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Mr. Hultman,

As Conservation Director of the Illinois B.A.S.S. Federation, I represent 84 B.A.S.S. affiliated clubs and approximately 1600 members. Moreover, I also represent the 500,000 members of our national organization in all matters concerning conservation, fishing access rights, etc. I sincerely hope that, even though I am not a resident of Minnesota, you will consider the following comments as it concerns the National Refuge.

Upon being made aware of the CCP and the Alternatives, several items concern us. Obviously, the inaccurate singling out one group of resource users (tournament anglers) as causing harm to the resource in order to benefit another group is of major concern. We submit that:

A) Bass boats are much quieter and much less disruptive than jet skis and airboats, especially when considering that the vast majority of the time the bass boat is in backwaters the electric trolling motor is being used while fishing. The six-inch wake of a bass boat on plane is insignificant compared to the 3-4 foot wakes of cabin cruisers and barges. In addition, the majority of bass boat drivers are safe, experienced and mindful of navigational rules, in sharp contrast to the thrill-seeking jet ski drivers. The lumping of these two groups is so inaccurate it's laughable.

B) The obvious negative portrayal of bass tournament anglers is indicative of the poorly veiled desires of the writers of CCP. B.A.S.S. is the standard-bearer of sportsmanship, conservation, youth programs and angling ethics. While we are aware that not all tournament anglers and tournaments are B.A.S.S. related, our standards have permeated nearly every fishing club and organization in the country. As users of the resource, the tournament anglers are the police, not the criminals.

C) Virtually no attention is given to improving aquatic habitat or otherwise improving the fishing resource. Many of the issues concerning the anglers are virtually being ignored, which is further indication of the desires of one group to curtail the lawful endeavors of another group of resource users, out of the assumption it will somehow enhance their own endeavors.

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D) Informational meetings in which it was suggested that an additional layer of permits were needed to regulate fishing tournaments further demonstrates the lack of factual information possessed by those making such presumptions.

Do those who claim this is needed really have so little faith in the State of Minnesota to perform their jobs properly in issuing the permits, as provided by law? It is another obvious attempt to discourage the lawful pursuit of tournament fishing on the Refuge.

Hopefully, Alternative E will contain a balance in ecosystem management with equal focus given to angling improvement and eliminate the untrue, unfair, data-unproven negative view of tournament angling. Dr. John Epifanio of the Illinois Natural History Survey, the research arm of the Illinois DNR, is head of the Aquatic Resource Center and would be glad to submit pertinent data that support our position that tournament angling overall does not negatively impact your fishing resources. The I.N.H.S. is one of the very top fisheries research institutions in the world and you can take their data to the bank. The Illinois B.A.S.S. Federation has cultivated a true partnership with our DNR, providing research scholarships and working together to improve our fisheries without impacting other users of the resource. I would suggest that a CCP containing equal benefits to the fisheries and tournament anglers would go a long way to developing a good relationship with the bass anglers of your state.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Hopefully, CCP will be a win-win for all.

Sincerely,

Milt Waltermire
Conservation Director
Illinois State B.A.S.S. Federation